

---

From: Don Becker  
Sent: Wednesday, March 18, 2009 11:37 AM  
To: 'rhinze1229@hotmail.com'  
Subject: Fire Department Agreement

You called last week and asked that I take a look at the spreadsheet that Village Board members put together as related to your suggestion of simplifying the agreement. I agree that an approach that will simplify the fire department agreement is much preferred. This e-mail contains my thoughts, and not of the Town Board. I have not discussed this with the Town Board. In your phone call, I believe you indicated that we should discuss this between the two of us to see if we could save some time in our joint meetings -- I don't think there is a person in the room who looks forward to the meetings. I would like to the opportunity to discuss this with you after you have had a chance to review my comments provided here.

The reason we are at this point today is that present and past board members of both organizations have looked at the costs of operating the fire department on a micro scale; and they wanted to manage the sharing of costs on a micro scale. You proposed a macro approach. The macro approach is very attractive to me, but you could see in the meeting how difficult this will be to sell. Simply look at the responses of individual members of both boards, and how quickly they were arguing that certain aspects of the agreement need to be linked to something or other, depending upon who was talking and what micro-expenditure was important to that person. If we are going to list dozens of items that will be used to calculate how we will share the costs of operating the fire department, how have we simplified things? Each of those items were discussed at length as we tried to negotiate an agreement that micro-managed the sharing of costs.

Following our last meeting, I gave this more more thought -- and even more after receiving the spreadsheet. I keep going back to your idea -- a macro approach. In my mind, and I hope yours also, it is clear that if we each had our own fire department, we would be paying considerably more than either of us are paying today. So anything that reduces costs is great; and an agreement that reduces the headaches of dividing up costs is even better.

The Town of Holland uses 4 fire departments to cover the town. For two of the fire departments, we simply pay an annual fee. They cover a small percentage of the town, and this seems to work the best. Our agreement with Oostburg is quite similar to that of Cedar Grove except that it is a macro-agreement and we have had no disagreements on how to share costs because of this macro approach. There are 4 communities that use the services of the Oostburg fire department, so we split all costs equally between the four communities. I suppose we could have used a ratio of the dollar value of property being protected, number of calls each had over a certain time period, or some other measure. But because it is a simple system of equally sharing in the costs, and because that equal sharing results in a lower cost to each community involved as compared to the go-it-alone approach, the system has worked, and worked well. I am not aware of anyone who has a gripe about that system. Shouldn't we use a simple system like that? This approach would share all costs down the middle except that the town would owe the village for rent and water in addition to their share of the split. Can you imagine the reduction of disputes and headaches going forward if an approach like this is used?

By going to a macro approach like that, we would eliminate recordkeeping, disagreements over sharing of costs, added tracking costs for use of trucks and equipment for non-emergency purposes, did it wear out or become obsolete, sharing of costs for mandated equipment changes, etc., etc., etc. In the end all that matters is that each community would have much lower costs than if they provided the services on their own. We can continue to debate each expense category on a micro-scale, or we can throw around statistics that show residents of one community pay more for fire protection per person, or per \$1,000 of improvements; but that becomes immaterial when we recognize that our costs are much lower than if we had our own department.

Bottom line is that I like your idea. It is what we are doing already with Oostburg, and it has worked well for everyone involved there. If we now muddle up the concept up by listing a couple dozen criteria by which we will determine the split, we have gone right back to micro-managing the sharing of each expense category and gained nothing. We may as well stay with the agreement that was virtually finished in our last meeting. Let's meet and talk when you have time. There isn't an issue with the open meetings law because neither of us can commit to anything, and there is no quorum of either board involved. We have an opportunity to put the bickering of the past behind us, but we have to get past the win-loose, won-lost baggage of the past.

Don Becker  
Alpha Terra Science  
1237 Pilgrim Road  
Plymouth, WI 53073  
Ph: 920-892-2444  
Cell: 920-207-6211